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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/20/15  
TAGS: SNAR PREL PGOV NI NARCOTICS  
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENT OBASANJO ON NARCOTICS

Classified by: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.5  
(b), (d)

REFS: A) Abuja 1956, B) Lagos 1427

¶1. (S) Summary: President Obasanjo wants immediate action taken on Nigeria's flagging performance in narcotics interdiction and is acutely aware of the consequences should Nigeria fail recertification. He has recalled Dr. Bello Lafiaji, Chairman of the Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) from Mecca, where he is keeping Small Salah (Little Hajj), to energize his agency. End summary.

¶2. (S) The British High Commissioner and I met with President Obasanjo on October 20 at the latter's request to follow up on our previous joint meeting with the Attorney General on Nigeria's apparently flagging performance in narcotics interdiction, and my own separate meetings with Dr. Bello Lafiaji and Steve Oronsaye, Principal Secretary to the President, on the same subject. Also present at our meeting was Maj. Gen. Abudullahi Mohammed (ret), the President's Chief of Staff. The President had invited the British High Commissioner, the German Ambassador and me to join an Iftar (daily breaking of the Ramadan fast) that he hosted the previous evening for the Muslim members of the diplomatic corps. On the margins of that event he had asked the High Commissioner and I to see him urgently on the apparently failing performance of the NDLEA.

¶3. (S) I opened the meeting by referring to the increased quantities of narcotics, especially heroin, entering the U.S. via Nigeria or through Nigerian hands. I also noted that no drug kingpins have been arrested in Nigeria since 2001, nor have there been any narcotics seizures of 50 kilos or more since that year. I expressed concern that the Joint Task Force, a coordinating mechanism between DEA and the NDLEA appeared moribund. The High Commissioner described an ongoing case in the UK of a Nigerian accused of narcotics smuggling who, apparently, benefited from evidence tampered with by agents of the NDLEA.

¶4. (S) The President expressed his disappointment. He said that he viewed improved narcotics interdiction in the same terms as suppression of trafficking in persons or the struggle against corruption by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission: all are central and essential elements of his presidency. He cut off Gen. Abudullahi Mohammed, who appeared to be starting to make excuses for NDLEA. He told Gen. Mohammed to have Dr. Bello Lafiaji return immediately from Mecca, where he is keeping the Small Salah (Little Hajj), to re-energize his agency. He also directed Mohammed to ensure the revitalization of the Joint Task Force.

¶5. (S) Comment: The British High Commissioner and I have touched a Presidential nerve. And, the President is fully aware of the consequences should Nigeria fail the narcotics recertification process. It remains to be seen, however, whether the Presidential directives will be translated into action.

CAMPBELL